

September 14, 2011

To: House Transportation Committee
Re: HB-4608



Committee Members:

I am here today to ask for your support of HB-4608 which will modify Michigan's mandatory helmet law for adult choice. The issue of the state or federal government mandating helmet usage versus individual adults using their own discretion has been ongoing since the early 1970's.

This is a very emotional and controversial issue and should be reviewed from an objective perspective. That is hard for many of us to do.

Helmet law advocates have continually used the **faulty premise** that if a state modifies its mandatory helmet law the fatality rates will increase by 20-40% and that this increases insurance costs and generally creates chaos. If that were the case then fatalities or more specifically, the fatality rate (fatalities/100 accidents) in the 30 states that allow "choice", should be 20-40% higher than states with a mandatory helmet law. That simply isn't true.

The graph that I have supplied gives you a factual look at the actual motorcycle fatality data taken from the real numbers provided by the National Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and the Department of Transportation (DOT). They compare states with mandatory helmet laws to those opting for adult choice on this issue. What it clearly shows is that there is **NO INCREASE** in fatality rates after a state modifies its helmet law. Note the **DECREASE** in motorcycle fatalities from 1978 - 2004 in ALL states.

Although there has been a slight increase in motorcycle fatalities in recent years, you will note that it is approximately the same for mandatory law states vs. adult choice states. This is due to is the dramatic increase in new motorcycle registrations and thus new **INEXPERIENCED RIDERS**. This points to the importance of rider education and licensing along with public awareness as the real safety issue.

As for the effect of adult choice for helmet usage on insurance rates, there is no state in the union that has increased its insurance rates with the modification of their mandatory helmet laws and, more importantly, there has been no state that has decreased their insurance rates with the implementation of a mandatory helmet law. When insurance industry representatives were asked in previous Senate hearings if insurance rates would increase if we allow the optional use of helmets, the answer was a simple "NO".

As to whether or not any state that has modified their helmet has seen an increase in medical costs in motorcycle accidents due to non- usage of a helmet, Pennsylvania and Florida (the two most recent states to adopt "adult choice"), have both taken the position that there has been no significant change in these costs. Furthermore, they have determined that in over half of the fatal motorcycle accidents in their states the victims were wearing a helmet.

Whether or not you believe in the effectiveness of wearing a motorcycle helmet, the fact is that **HELMET LAWS** have had no effect on reducing neither motorcycle accidents nor fatality rates and they have deterred motorcycle tourism to our great state.

The most effective way to reduce motorcycle fatalities and injuries is to reduce accidents. The most effective way to do this is to provide motorcycle rider education courses to make safer riders and motorcycle awareness programs for car drivers. ABATE of Michigan does both.

Thank you for your consideration. Sincerely,

Jim Rhoades - ABATE of Michigan - Legislative Director
Motorcycle Safety Foundation - Instructor/Coach 1979 - Present
REMCO Remodeling and Design, LLC - Owner

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Do Helmet Laws Affect Safety? The Facts

50 State Data, Fatalities in Percent of Registrations

